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NSC BRIEFING

12 April 1962

LAOS

I. Politically, there is a total stalemate in Laos.

A. Phoumi remains unalterably opposed to a coalition government under Souvanna.

1. He still contends that a Souvanna government can lead only to the communization of Laos.

2. He still argues for a government under the aegis of King Savang, with a cabinet representing all diverse elements. This has been termed unacceptable by Souvanna and Souphannouvong, and the King himself is most reluctant to take a political role.

B. Souphannouvong, with the Pathet Lao military force at hand and the Bloc behind him, is insisting on strong representation for his Communist group and for Souvanna's neutralist forces in any coalition government.

C. Souvanna now has left Laos for an indefinite stay in Europe, but says he is willing to return to Laos for further efforts if they seem to hold promise.

1. Souvanna has to contend not only with pressure from Souphannouvong but with dissension among his own forces. Protracted absence is likely to reduce his influence proportionately.

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II. Prolongation of the political stalemate increases danger of a military flare-up.

A. Vientiane forces currently total ^{75,130}~~72,580~~, including ^{12,500}~~9,850~~ Meo guerrillas.

B. The government forces are opposed by a total of 37,900 enemy troops. The Pathet Lao have 19,100, the neutralist "Kong Le" forces 9,800, and technical and military elements from North Vietnam number 9,000.

C. The opposing forces are in contact at Mahaxay-Nhommarath (east of Thakhek), the Nam Beng valley (east of Luang Prabang), and at Nam Tha. In addition, Meo troops, armed and supported by the US Government, are active behind enemy lines in the provinces of Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang, and Sam Neua.

D. At Nam Tha--the most critical area at present--Phoumi now has six battalions defending the town, with an additional paratroop battalion prepared to reinforce the garrison. [] Phoumi against concentrating such a large proportion of his troops there, but he insists this is necessary to convince the world that he will stand up to the Communists. There has recently been a sharp increase in Communist airlift activity to the Nam Tha area, suggesting a major reinforcement of enemy forces threatening the town.

E. Souvanna has stated his neutralist forces will not exploit any royal army weakness in the event of a Western

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withdrawal of military support. Souphannouvong--more bellicose--has declared his intention to mop up areas where he feels Phoumi has strengthened his position since the 3 May 1961 cease-fire.

F. Extensive logistical support reaches the antigovernment forces in Laos from North Vietnamese territory.

1. The Communist airlift capability recently has been augmented by ten LI-2 (DC-3 type) transports which arrived in North Vietnam from the USSR in late February. This makes about 61 aircraft available for airlift operations.
2. Roads into Laos from North Vietnam have been improved.
3. At least 40 to 50 (and possibly as many as 80 to 90) light amphibious tanks have reached the antigovernment forces in Laos from North Vietnam.

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